

Book Review

Genetic Testing for Cancer: Psychological Approaches for Helping Patients and Families.

By Andrea Farkas Patenaude. American Psychological Association (APA), Washington, DC, 2004, 305 pp., \$59.95 (hardback).

Andrea Patenaude is a well-respected psychologist working with the renowned cancer genetics team at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute and Children's Hospital of Boston and Harvard Medical School. As the chair of the APA's Genetics Advisory Council, she has been building bridges between psychology and genetics professionals for over a decade. Those of us in the field who have benefited from Dr. Patenaude's expertise and wisdom were overjoyed to hear of the arrival of this text, which is sure to become a classic.

In his Foreword, Francis Collins opines that psychologists will serve the "genomics revolution" as members of transdisciplinary research teams, contributors to understanding individual and social dynamics of using genetic information, and as contributors to relevant societal dialogue. It is without dispute that this book will be invaluable to clinical and research psychologists, counselors, and social workers. This review will make the case that *Genetic Testing for Cancer* will raise the counseling bar for cancer genetic counselors as well.

The author's aim is "to share what researchers have learned about how individuals with concerns related to hereditary cancer react to and cope with genetic information and how they make choices related to their health and lifestyle." She not only reviews the literature, but identifies gaps in our knowledge. She organizes her material into 10 chapters covering cancer genetics and genetic counseling, psychological issues common to all cancer genetic conditions, and focused chapters on family dynamics, testing children, and social issues. Bibliographies are provided at the end of each chapter. The book closes with lists of suggested websites, books, videos, and organizations (including NSGC) related to cancer and genetics as well as a helpful index.

The writing style is clear and readable; the research and scholarship are top notch throughout. There are tables, graphs, and figures in the early chapters to aid in the explanations of complex genetics and oncology topics. The genetic information is accurate and at a level that makes the early chapters an understandable introduction for students as well as nongenetics social and health scientists and policy makers. This is not, however, just a text for beginners; the author demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the complex intertwining of medical, genetic, and psychosocial issues. This text has the breadth to place the psychological issues in the broader contemporary biopsychosocial context as well as a level of specificity that rings true to practicing counselors.

One chapter addresses research on a potpourri of topics including unresolved grief, distress, cancer phobia, risk perception, culture, health beliefs, and behaviors. The chapter opens with a fictitious case of Ms. P, referred for symptoms of agoraphobia associated with family and personal history of cancer. Cases like this throughout the text provide smooth segues between research findings, didactic information, and clinical applications. Having a decade of our literature summarized in one chapter allows for deeper analyses and easier comparisons among the psychosocial studies of the main susceptibility syndromes.

The chapter on test disclosure begins with a discussion of possible test results, including variants of unknown significance and indeterminate negative results. She then describes possible psychological sequelae of testing from research studies and case reports: distress, worry, somatization, guilt, confusion, withholding or lying, regret, and some paradoxical reactions. This chapter includes a small but helpful section on clinical assessment of acute distress following disclosure. The author's synthesis of individual studies from unique populations into a deeper understanding of the interactions of individual and family issues goes well beyond what meta-analyses can offer.

There is an entire chapter devoted to the complex issue of prophylactic surgery. While much of

the medical information is available elsewhere, the explication of the ways that the psychosocial issues dovetail with the medical is unique. The section on recommendations for psychological consultations to patients considering prophylactic surgery has been long needed.

The chapters on family dynamics and children contain some of the richest material. For example, Dr. Patenaude addresses, in her compassionate way, the issue of undue family coercion on carriers of mutations to take certain actions e.g., by reframing these behaviors as the person having a difficult time imagining an alternate way of coping with the threat of cancer or letting their fear of future illness in themselves or relatives overwhelm their empathy for different views. She considers issues specific to sibs, spouses, adoption, twins, obligate carriers, lesbians, and single women. In the chapter on children, she presents information that children are well aware of the threats of cancer to their own and others' health. There are helpful tables of factors that affect children's understanding of genetic information and on the pros and cons of testing children for adult onset conditions. The author handles research on communication of parental cancer test results to their children disease by disease.

This book may also help cancer genetic counselors define our role in the emerging healthcare environment and better explain that role to other healthcare professionals. The author believes that the genetic counselor falls somewhere between the internist/oncologist with primary responsibility for the health of the patient and the psychotherapist with an interest in healing emotional conflicts and interpersonal difficulties. Thus, we may ask not only medical details of the family history, but perhaps also inquire "And how do you get along with your affected sister?" Dr. Patenaude helps us know where to go from there.

Fittingly for one who has played a major national role in the development of multidisciplinary cancer genetics practice and research, the author ends with considerations of relevant and challenging ethical, legal, and social issues.

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